

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Self-reported needs and priorities of LGBTI+ Older Persons in COSTA RICA

INTRODUCTION

There are specific physical, psychological, and social changes that take place in later adulthood, creating unique challenges and needs for older adults. It is very important we understand the unique needs of older adults in order to ensure they age with dignity. This is especially true for LGBTI+ older adults who live at the intersection of ageism, homophobia and transphobia.

Within this context, **CIPAC** and **ASPIDH** with collaboration from SAGE, executed a joint project, the **LGBTI Elders Advancing Initiative**. As part of this initiative, interviews and surveys were conducted with LGBTI+ older adults in Costa Rica and El Salvador on their needs, livelihoods, and personal experiences. The main findings obtained in Costa Rica are reported below.

METHODOLOGY

A total of **101 personas** were interviewed throughout Costa Rica between May and June 2022. Participating LGBTQ seniors 50 years or older, were selected through RDS Sampling. The scope of the populations proved to be challenging regarding population representation. However, it should be noted that **23%** were *individuals with disabilities*, **17%** resided in *rural areas*, **37%** identified as *mestizo*, **3%** as *indigenous*, **3%** identified as *intersex*, **30.7%** were *lesbians*, **11.9%** were *bisexual* and **16%** *transgender women*.

Participants were contacted through a *seed selection process* and asked to refer us to other individuals we could contact who could potentially participate in the survey. As part of the process, we tried to ensure that the contact lists were representative of the entire population sampled, which was quite challenging. Interviews were conducted by telephone and in some cases in person. A standardized mobile survey tool was used for onsite interviews.

MAIN RESULTS

INCOME AND HEALTH

16.4% hold informal jobs and **14.9%** do not have any type of insurance coverage or direct income.

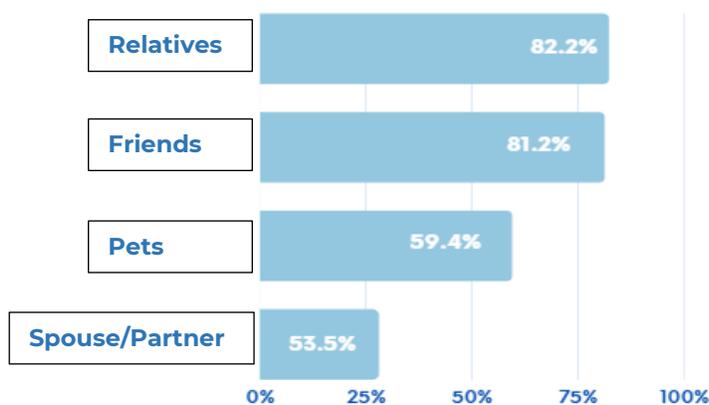
32% who reported a stable income are independent workers/freelancers and **26.2%** are government employees.

There is limited access to healthcare (**average of 38.4%**), and many individuals stated that they had not used these services in the past few months, notwithstanding the fact that more than **69%** of the interviewees reported chronic diseases. Most described the quality of the healthcare services offered as very good-good.

Perception about own current personal situation worsened during the pandemic but has been gradually returning to pre-pandemic levels. Conditions deemed as the worst include lack of exercise, concern about their emotional state, and quality of sleep.

CARE AND SUPPORT NETWORKS

A good level of support networks was reported and emphasized as follows:



It is also noteworthy that online communication with friends from the community/neighbors and activist groups/collectives was also mentioned.

37.8% are mostly family caretakes. **18.8%** stated that they are cared for by someone else.

DISCRIMINATION

28.7% stated having experienced some type of discrimination from family members, friends, or their community and out of this group, **72.4%** attribute discrimination to their **sexual orientation**, whereas **58.6%** to **gender identity** and **10.3%** to their **age**.

Regarding **healthcare services**, most of the respondents did not report discrimination. The **4%** who reported having experienced discrimination, attribute it to their **gender identity**, and second to their age

HOUSING

Most of the respondents stated that they **are homeowners while 21.8% pay rent** for their homes and **4%** are **homeless**. Homelessness tends to be more prevalent in individuals that lack regular income and have no permanent income and no education, as well as for transgender women.

A total of **65% of the interviewees** stated that they live **alone** and most of the individuals who stated that they lived with someone else, generally the majority live with their family or friends.

Un **35.6%** fear that they will lose their homes during their old age, mainly due to trepidation about not being able to afford housing, and worry about not being able to afford housing.

PROBLEMS FACED BY AGING POPULATIONS AND THE ELDERLY

The following were mentioned as issues of great concern among LGBTI+ seniors:

74.3% Lack of a support network to care for them

74.3% Economic dependance on others.

73.3% Poor quality of life during their old age.

Other concerns mentioned included **loneliness/isolation**, financial uncertainty and not being able to afford their living expenses.

Most concerns reported about old age include:

59.4% Loss of independence

56.4% Deterioration of their physical health.

54.5% Deterioration of their mental health.

53.5% Not having someone available to care for them.

Another highly referenced issue involved personal **finances** and not having enough money to afford covering basic needs and livelihood.

There was a tendency for interviewees to describe their greatest fears and negative experiences in terms of their socioeconomic status. Transgender women, particularly, are at a higher risk of economic insecurity when addressing these concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote campaigns to both empower the LGBTI+ population and raise awareness among the population-at-large.
- Significant efforts must be channeled at a state-wide administrative level to provide better access to healthcare and welfare services. More facilities are required to provide more options for decent housing, care, and shelter.
- Establish mechanisms that favor and systematize inclusive activities and initiatives within the LGBTI+ populations themselves (NGOs, collectives, among others).
- Focused and urgent attention juxtaposed with effective strategies are imperative for LGBTI+ populations to gain better access to different healthcare and welfare benefits as well as other social services. LGBTI+ seniors must also have access to support networks targeted to the LGBTI+ community. Furthermore, state programs must be adopted to attenuate current conditions.
- Conduct and foster research focused on examine the unmet needs unique to LGBTI+ seniors as it relates to the aging process and old age.
- Advocate for policies that will mainstream the needs and concerns of LGBTI+ seniors as stated in the Inter-American Convention on the Rights of the Elderly and other international human rights commitments endorsed and mainstreamed by the Costa Rican state, such as the National Policy on Old Age and Aging, Standards for Enabling Care Facilities, and the National Plan for Healthy Aging, etc.